

WHERE ARE THE CLOSE ENCOUNTERS?

BY MARK RODEGHIER

Those of us who follow the ebb and flow of raw UFO reports, whether to MUFON or CUFOS, or to well-known websites, including the National UFO Reporting Center, have come to recognize the drop in close encounter cases. Whether it is physical trace events or a good old fashioned CE3 with the sighting of a humanoid, these cases seem much less frequent nowadays.

The latest report from Chris Rutkowski's Canadian UFO Survey (survey.canadianuforeport.com) confirms this trend. Figure 1 shows the number of reports received each year across Canada. For whatever reason, reports in general have greatly increased in this decade, although the total dropped a bit in 2005. There are far more UFOs reported now than in the 1990s in Canada. The same is generally true for the United States, although perhaps with not as great an increase since 2000.

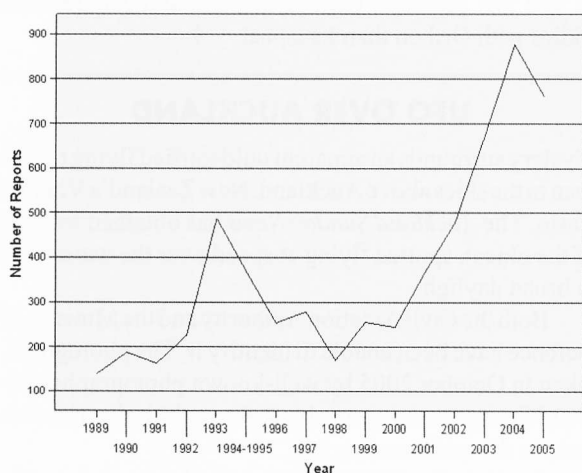


Figure 1. Number of reports.

What about close encounters? Have they followed the same trend? Figure 2 provides the answer.

The number of reports is much smaller—only about 4%

of reports are close encounters over the 17-year period in Canada—so there are larger relative swings from year to year. But close encounters generally do increase, beginning in the current decade, although not to the higher levels of the 1990s.

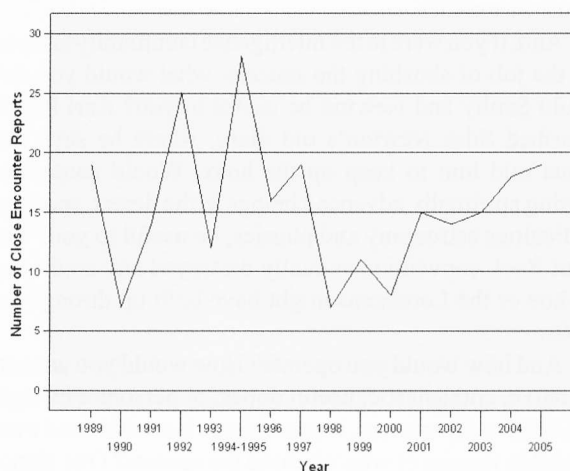


Figure 2. Number of close encounter reports.

But is this the whole story? I'd suggest not. I and colleagues have noticed that close encounters are not as common, compared to other cases. To investigate this, we need to look at the percentage of all sightings that are close encounters.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of all reports that are close encounters, by year. It is immediately evident that our sense of the data has been correct. There has been a fairly steady drop in the percentage of close encounters since the first year of the Canadian survey in 1989. Close encounters now comprise only about 2 percent of all reports.

What does it all mean? Are UFOs reluctant to come near to witnesses? Do they no longer land? Since witnesses generally can't seek out a UFO close encounter, it would seem that influences beyond witness behavior would be underlying this trend. Still, if witnesses were now more likely to report distant events of lights in the sky, but less likely to report close encounters, we would see the same pattern. But I can't easily imagine why that disparity would be true.

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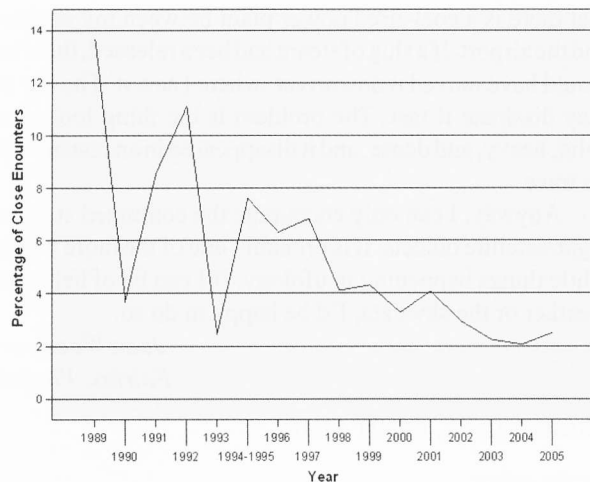


Figure 3. Percentage of close encounters.

This pattern is further evidence that the characteristics of the UFO phenomenon are not fixed and immutable. The appearance and behavior of the phenomenon has changed quite a bit over time (e.g., from disks to triangles), and this change is one of the latest examples. It would certainly be interesting to see data for other countries to see if this trend holds more broadly. ♦

UFO RESEARCH QUEENSLAND

UFO Research Queensland is a voluntary, nonprofit association established in 1956 to receive, research, and record sightings. It is located in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, and is holding its 50th anniversary conference on September 30–October 1. Check out their website at www.uforq.asn.au.

LETTERS

CLOUDS AND SATELLITE OBJECTS

To the editor:

I read Herbert Taylor's recent article ("Cloud Cigars: A Further Look," *IUR* 30:3), and then went back and reread his two earlier *IUR* articles ("Satellite Objects and Cloud Cigars," 29:1, and "Mystery Clouds and the UFO Connection," 29:4). First, let me say that my efforts in ufology have been through the lens of animal reactions (or not) during UFO events. Because animal reactions are associated with UFO events that are estimated to be within 200 feet of witnesses, and almost never more than 500 feet away, I don't have a lot of experience evaluating distant UFO events, which most of his sightings are. On the other hand, because I do Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*) migration studies with my husband (involving hours of sky watching, i.e., cloud watching, storm watching, aircraft watching, and a few seconds of nighthawk watching), I have some feeling for clouds and how they look and what they do. That's my background, just so you can see where I'm coming from.

First, a few words about the second article on mystery clouds/UFOs. This aspect of his studies strikes me as weak. I have seen natural cloud events that bear great similarity to almost all of the daytime cloud events. Also, my experience indicates when many witnesses see something they decide is strange, they will link anything else they observe to the strangeness in a very uncritical way.

Having watched clouds form from nothing and dissipate to nothing; shadows within clouds giving very strange effects only understood with high-power binoculars put on the situation; balloons in clouds (once hundreds of small black balloons moving into clouds—no question, could see strings with binoculars); aircraft leaving and departing two nearby airports, then flying in and out of clouds with

interesting lighting conditions, I think it would be very hard to critically investigate or draw conclusions about these cloud/UFO associations. I'm not saying there could not be valid cloud/UFO connections in there somewhere, but I don't see how you would get at it among all the noise. Not much hard information in these events. So I would have very high criteria for including any of these.

Turning attention to cloud cigars and satellite objects—this is much more interesting in that you are actually getting some consistency in behavior and appearance between sightings (rare event in my opinion and to be valued). The vertical/horizontal orientations and repositioning, the clouds formed at ends, the small objects being released, similarity in their fall from the larger object, and then small objects moving out to "survey" the area (loosely speaking), and the long durations are all interesting clues. The multiple witnesses add strength, and I found the September 1954 sighting in France interesting in its complexity.

I think some weeks ago I saw a reference in an email to tornadoes as an explanation, which doesn't fit as tornadoes are associated with dynamic, fast-moving weather events. Years ago, I once saw little funnel clouds attempting to descend from a front roaring into D.C., and they were constantly changing as the front ripped through and no one would ever think "carrot" or "cigar." They would think funnel cloud trying to descend.

So I have little to suggest in terms of explanations. I would encourage Taylor to continue his cloud cigar/satellite object study. I think this kind of focused study is very worthwhile. I think hard-nosed investigation of current sighting events is an important area for ufology, but I seem to be somewhat isolated in that opinion—hence my recent loss of enthusiasm.

I know after my animal reaction study was published, I